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STEPHEN W. WILLIAMS. *The Cistercian Abbey of Strata Florida.*

The important abbey of Strata Florida in Cardiganshire has hitherto escaped treatment in a monograph, though the publications of the Cambrian Archæological Association have given some attention to its history. Its annals make Strata Florida a worthy subject for the monastic historian. In 1164 a convent of Cistercian monks came first to Strata Florida, but whether they came from the immediate vicinity, from the Welsh abbey of Blanchland, or direct from the parent house at Cîteaux is not known. Rhys ap Tewdwr, Prince of South Wales from 1077 to 1089, established a house for monks during his troublous sovereignty on the banks of the Flur, two miles southwest of the abbey which was founded about a century later by his grandson Rhys ap Gruffydd. The great church and block of conventual buildings were not completed until Whitsun Eve, 1203. Here the princes and great men of the country sought interment, so that Strata Florida has been not inaptly styled the Westminster Abbey of Wales. In 1284 the belfry was struck by lightning and caught fire, the whole of the lead-covered church being completely gutted except the presbytery. Ten years later the monastic buildings were destroyed by fire, deliberately caused by Edward I. In the days of Owen Glendower much of the monastery was again burnt by the English, and Henry IV devastated its lands, so that by the time of the Reformation the magnificence and power of Strata had so much waned that the Dissolution found but seven monks watching over the ashes of the mighty princes there laid to rest.

Until recently, nothing of the remains of this great monastery was visible save an archway and piece of the wall of the western front of the church. This work is of transitional Norman style and not a little remarkable, the five co-ordinate arches of the great western doorway being bound together by a curious ornament resembling pastoral staffs. This singular doorway is well depicted on the frontispiece to this volume. In 1887-8, excavations were made at the expense of the Cambrian Archæological Association, under the direction of Mr. Stephen Williams. The outlines of the great church (213 × 61 feet) have now been ascertained, and to a great extent laid bare, as well as the chapter-house and adjacent buildings. One of the most interesting discoveries was the unearthing of a series of monks' graves on the eastern external side of the south transept, several of which had their carved headstones, as well as the flat slabs, still *in situ*. The flat stones show the rough diagonal tooling of the Norman period, but several of the headstones have early interlaced patterns of Keltic type. Our conjecture is that these have been reused, having been brought here from some older place of interment. The most valuable find was the large remains of tile pavements, both incised and encaustic, in the transept chapels. These tile pavements

are exceptionally good in design and rich in glazing and coloring. Some of the patterns are unique, and Strata Florida may now fairly claim to have the finest series of tile pavements of any old abbey in England or Wales. Excellent drawings are given of these tiles, both in detail, and as illustrating their general position and design. The Rev. A. S. Porter, F.S.A., our best authority on ancient tiles, pronounces those of Strata Florida to date from about the middle of the XIV century.—*Athenæum*, Aug. 24.

CIRIACO-MIGUEL VIGIL. *Asturias monumental, epigráfica y diplomática*. Tom. I, Texto; tom. II, Láminas. Oviedo, 1887.

It was not an unimportant moment for the historiography of Spain, when some ten years ago these two volumes were laid before the Royal Academy of Madrid, and by their recommendation the government was urged to print and circulate as many copies as possible. Vigil is the Nestor of Spanish antiquarians, and, as a collector and investigator of Asturian inscriptions, he has greatly assisted Hübner in preparing the second volume of the *Corpus*. The work is at present represented by two volumes, (1) a descriptive text, (2) plates consisting of photo-engravings of original drawings. The largest part of this latter volume gives plates of inscriptions. A third volume, now in preparation, will contain documents and chronicles. The whole work aims to advance historical study, but is not without value for the philologist. In treating of the Latin inscriptions, even of those already published in the *Corpus*, Vigil's remarks have great value and independence. Many new inscriptions have also been added; early Latin, as well as Christian. It is, however, the topographical remarks that will be of most lasting value. For all future work in this province, a certain footing has been gained that will spare the coming investigator endless toil. On the treatment of the manuscripts, like praise cannot be bestowed: as examples of paleography and artistic decoration they have scarcely any value. Nor does Vigil state how in the second half of the ninth century Oviedo, if not the richest, was certainly the most valuable library in all Spain. It is from the school of these scribes of Oviedo that the so-called *Cruz de los angeles de Oviedo*, so common in collections of Spanish manuscripts, finds its origin. The author mentions several of the curious complexes or labyrinths of letters found in these manuscripts. In one of them, the words *Silo princeps fecit* can be read out from a centre in various directions 506 times, but such are not limited to Spain. Vigil closes a long controversy over the Westgothic numeral χ^{\sim} , by deciding conclusively that it means 40. In the development of Spanish Latin, of book-lore and of episcopology, his work offers interesting material. Sincere should be the hope of all students of Spanish antiquity that the other provinces might be as fully and as thoroughly treated as Asturias.—R. BEER, in *Berl. phil. Woch.*, 1889, No. 25.